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READER TO RIDER

—Gerald Weales

THE

Commonweal

The School Question

A View from Abroad

by George H. Dunne

Visit to a Small Satellite

A Trip Behind the Curtain

by Gabriel Gersh

MAPLES IN A SPRUCE FOREST: A POEM . . . by John Updike
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MOMENT FOR VIETNAM: A POEM . . . . by Sister Mary Faith

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A Critical Role

Criticism comes as second nature to a journal of opinion such as The Commonweal. Without voicing it continually this magazine would hardly get very far in interpreting the current scene. This would be true regardless of whatever irascibility, feelings of superiority, or disloyal sentiments unfriendly readers might ascribe to its various editors and contributors. And this journal's approach naturally includes both criticism of others and realistic scrutiny of our own ways and institutions.

The tendency to question the way things are going on the national scene, and to take issue with various American policies toward foreign peoples, is doubtless less pronounced when it has to deal with the errors or inadequacies involved in responsible efforts to break out along new paths. Criticism was decidedly pronounced in our pages in the latter stages of the Eisenhower era, when we felt that, instead of trying to soothe the public conscience and seeking to dispel any popular anxiety, Washington should have been alerting the citizenry to the ground America was losing to the Sino-Soviet axis and acknowledging the danger confronting this nation and the free world.

Where Catholics as Catholics are concerned, the problem of criticism is obviously more delicate. Discussion seems to take on a more personal character. For one thing, the sacrifices entailed in establishing and maintaining Catholic institutions make them particularly sensitive to criticism. Yet there is a growing realization in recent years of the extent to which self-criticism serves as an important preliminary to better things.

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Editor
EDWARD S. SKILLIN

Managing Editor
JAMES O'GARA

Associate Editors
JAMES FINN
RICHARD HORCHLER

Drama Critic: RICHARD HAYES; *Movie Critic:* PHILIP T. HARTUNG; *Paris:* ROBERT BARRAT; *Rome:* GUNNAR D. KUMLIEN; *Great Britain:* MICHAEL P. FOGARTY

JOHN BRUBAKER: *Advertising Manager*

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THE
Commonweal
A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts
THIRTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

week by week

VIENNA BOUND

ONE OF THE most convincing arguments of John F. Kennedy's campaign was his formula for the conduct of foreign policy. His preference for "quiet and traditional" diplomacy over "personal" negotiations led Americans to believe, for one thing, that he would be in no hurry to meet with Mr. Khrushchev. There were other reasons. Mr. Kennedy spoke of the importance of negotiating from strength; it would take time to stiffen the nation's defenses and firm the NATO and other alliances. The new Administration would also need time to review official policies in various sectors of the globe and come to definite decisions. Finally, when these decisions were made and the objectives set, America would need to reach agreements with its allies and then arrive at understandings with lesser Soviet diplomats on which subsequent summit negotiations could be based.

In the four months since Mr. Kennedy's inauguration, none of these requirements has been fulfilled. Yet he has agreed to meet with Mr. Khrushchev in Vienna on June 3. To be sure, this is not to be a full-fledged summit conference. Both leaders declared that "this meeting is not for the purpose of negotiating or reaching an agreement on the major international problems that involve the interest of many other countries." It is rather to provide personal contact and an opportunity for a general exchange of views. It may be only a halfway summit meeting, but it is a resort to personal diplomacy after all.

What has transpired so early in his first year to lead Mr. Kennedy actually to take some of the initiative toward such a meeting? For one thing a series of Soviet victories and American defeats; for another, increased toughness on the part of the Soviet Union in various negotiations. Its unbending attitude threatens to break up for good the Geneva conference on a nuclear test ban, thus leaving the way open for other nations to develop thermonuclear weapons of their own. This last would make effective control infinitely more difficult.

Doubtless the critical nature of the situation is responsible: wide possession of nuclear weapons could easily lead to a holocaust, and the Soviets in their elation over current successes may believe they can with impunity risk a major challenge to the West. Such dangers have led to a new attitude on personal diplomacy. Possibly the fact that quiet, traditional representations were able to do so little to avert a series of United States defeats and renewed Soviet belligerence also have something to do with our agreeing to a meeting. At this unhappy juncture there is much to be said for a fresh start.

FOR MR. KHRUSHCHEV the Vienna meeting involves a number of appealing prospects. His past diplomatic successes imbue him with supreme confidence for the encounter. He believes that Russia's fortunes are on a new upsurge while those of the West continue to decline. He relishes another big opportunity to make propaganda that will be heard round the world. He can be expected to exploit to the full the U.S.S.R.'s comparative advantages in spectacular scientific achievements and new political gains in Africa, the Far East, the Middle East and Latin America. Mr. Khrushchev will be riding the crest of Soviet success.

But Mr. Kennedy hardly will go to the Vienna meeting unarmed. It is said that Chinese possession of the bomb would not at all be to Khrushchev's liking. The President can therefore underline the danger inherent in a failure to reach a nuclear test ban agreement because of the Soviets' impossible veto demands. Another warning Mr. Kennedy is expected to deliver personally is even more direct.

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It is apparent that, after consultation with our NATO allies, we have renewed our decision to defend Berlin. Although this message could have been conveyed to the Kremlin through the ordinary diplomatic channels, the impact will be that much greater if delivered in person by the President.

What will be the personal impression each makes upon the other? It is doubtful that President Kennedy will greatly revise the opinion he expressed after meeting Khrushchev two years ago. He then spoke of the Russian leader as "a tough-minded, articulate, hard-reasoning spokesman for a system in which he was thoroughly versed and in which he thoroughly believed. He was not the prisoner of any ancient dogma or limited vision. And he was not putting on any act. . . ." The more crucial question is how Mr. Khrushchev reacts to Mr. Kennedy. Will his reputed intuition help him to discern in the American President a toughness resembling his own? Will he regard our Cuban fiasco only as another welcome American defeat—and within but a few miles of this nation's shores—or will he also perceive there a sign of Mr. Kennedy's determination, and his willingness to take risks, when he believes the situation demands it?

If it would be folly to build up expectations for a meeting to be held under such unfavorable circumstances, it would likewise be a mistake to suppose that nothing useful can come from this special opportunity to remind the Soviet Union of our determination and our far from negligible strength.

VIOLENCE IN ALABAMA

IT SHOULD be said at the outset that, contrary to some Southern papers, the guilt is not shared by both sides. The "Freedom Riders" who were set upon in Montgomery are not "crackpots," "senseless trouble makers" or "rabble-rousers." The "Freedom Riders" are a group of white and Negro American citizens who put to the test rights which are guaranteed by the Constitution.

Under the ruling of the Supreme Court a state is forbidden to impose segregation on interstate transportation. In some of our states, however, custom has long dictated, and present practice upholds, segregation in public vehicles. The "Freedom Riders" forced public attention to consider the discrepancy and they devised a plan to challenge it head on.

It is undeniable that the "Freedom Riders" courted publicity and danger by proclaiming their intention to ride through areas where racial tensions run high. But this is irrelevant to the great question of who shall prevail. Will it be the riders who are operating without violence and within their legal rights, or the rioters who resort to violence in defiance of the law? Will it be the federal government upholding the rights of all citizens or the government of Alabama which discriminates? Will it be order and justice recently enacted into law or the disorder which has been perpetuated by "lifelong custom"?

To all these questions there can be only one answer. The problem is to bring that answer into existence as soon as possible with as little violence as possible. Governor Patterson and local police officers must share responsibility with the rioters for the violence which has already taken place. Fortunately, the federal government acted promptly and decisively to curb the excesses which the Governor's attitude invited. Unless the current of events shifts radically, the "Riders," bruised and beaten, will have won a significant round. Far from aggravating the disease of racial hatred, as some have charged, they will have lanced a suppurating ulcer.

EMBATTLED AMISH FARMERS

NOBODY loves the tax collector, and small wonder. The latest piece of Internal Revenue Service publicity had to do with the seizure of three horses from an Amish farmer in Pennsylvania who refused on religious grounds to pay Social Security taxes.

Because the Amish believe that "insurance" of any kind is sinful, and that Social Security amounts to a kind of insurance, the most conservative members of the sect have refused to make the payments due from them as self-employed workers. The Amish hold it equally wrong to receive insurance payments, and no member of their group has ever collected any Social Security benefits.

The recently publicized "forcible collection" involved an Amish farmer who owed $308.96 in Social Security payments. Three of this farmer's six horses were seized and sold at auction by the I.R.S., which received $460 for the horses, charged the owner $113.15 for auction expenses and feed, and presented him with the difference of $37.89 and a paid-up Social Security bill.

Reacting to the bad press it has received over this incident, the Internal Revenue Service has issued a lengthy explanation of its "unpleasant and difficult task," concluding with the statement that it had

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'no other choice under the law." No doubt the tatement is accurate, and the service had no other :hoice, but one feels immediately that this is just he point—there should be another choice.

Sometimes, we know, the religious or conscienti- ous convictions of citizens must be overridden in he interest of the public good, even in a free society. But it is an essential qualification of this principle hat such violation of individual conscience by the tate must be undertaken as a last resort, when it is udged to be clearly necessary for the sake of the general good.

The beliefs of this unusual minority group in Pennsylvania may be baffling to most Americans, nd there is no doubt that their eccentric ways have proved vexatious in the extreme to the public officials who must deal with them. Still, the forcible eizure of a farmer's horses seems not to be either a desirable or necessary solution to this particular problem created by his religious convictions.

It was back in 1955 that Social Security coverage vas extended to farmers, and the tax bureau's roubles with the Amish go back to that date. Faced by this situation for six long years, it would seem hat the I.R.S. could have worked out some kind of nethod for dealing with it, either through appeals or legislative remedy or through some sort of administrative provision. Surely it does not end the natter to say merely, "We have no other choice nder the law."

CIENCE AND NONSENSE

WE CALL attention to a statement by Dr. Kenneth Boulding not because it is startling ut because it no longer is. In an address to the National Conference on Social Welfare Dr. Boulding xpressed succinctly a view that can be found with ncreasing frequency in our national journals.

"If science and technology give us death control," e said, "it must also give us birth control. We must eventually have a stable population. This means n average of a little over two children or so per amily, and no nonsense."

Dr. Boulding is an original and vigorous thinker nd his many writings show a deep concern for the velfare of the individual and of his society. These ualities are inevitably lost in an isolated quotation, ut the quotation is valuable nevertheless because t reveals the logical steps of Dr. Boulding's thought, tripped of subtlety and supporting reasons. We nust eventually have a stable population, he argues. ince science and technology have allowed us some control over death, we must look to them for a measure of control over birth. ". . . . A little over two children or so per family, and no nonsense."

Technology and science have been and will continue to be great boons to mankind. They have given us tools without which the modern world could not exist. But they do not yet dictate the ends of the modern world. They do not provide the reasons for death control or birth control—they simply provide the means. They do not provide the grounds or the impetus for the judgment implied in Dr. Boulding's "and no nonsense."

These are simple and obvious statements which few would dispute. But, increasingly—in spite of *Brave New World* and its counterparts—too many people speak as if they were in doubt, as if the goals of man and his society could be determined scientifically. Dr. Boulding has hold of a real problem. But the solution, unfortunately, is not yet in sight. And if one thing emerges clearly from all discussions about how to deal with the problem of an expanding world population it is that what seems nonsense to one group is eminently sensible to another.

THANKS A LOT BUT NO THANKS

THERE ARE veterans' organizations and veterans' organizations. The American Veterans Committee, for instance, is a post-World War II creation which is not nearly so well known or as large (twenty-five thousand members) as the others. It is rather a maverick, liberal sort of group—that's right—which from time to time rises up and shatters the stereotyped image one has of the middle-aged boys in the overseas caps.

Recently the A.V.C. did it again. The Committee held its fourteenth annual convention in New York, and at this convention passed a resolution condemning the payment of disability benefits to most of the nation's disabled veterans. Seriously disabled war veterans are not sufficiently compensated, the resolution held, but the great mass of disabled veterans are receiving government "largesse" under a system which is "as unnecessary as it is wasteful."

Resolutions like this are not likely to swell the A.V.C.'s membership to the point where it is a threat to the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars, but the A.V.C. has done a remarkable and heartening thing in abandoning the special interest loyalty we have come to take for granted everywhere in our national life.

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ON FROM PITTSBURGH

A FEW WEEKS ago I spoke at the biennial convention of the National Council of Catholic Men, meeting in Pittsburgh with Bishop John J. Wright as host. For one reason or another, my report on the affair has been considerably delayed but, late or not, I do not want to let the occasion pass without comment.

The N.C.C.M., I would guess, is not without its share of problems. On paper it embraces organizations that number eight or nine million Catholic men. In practice its structure seems to be very loose indeed, and it is obvious that some of the affiliated organizations in the various dioceses represent views quite at variance with those of the national leadership.

As I understand it, the N.C.C.M. exerts no authority over groups which voluntarily affiliate with it and use its services; it is simply a clearing house for program ideas, training techniques and organizational methods. How fully parish or diocesan organizations utilize N.C.C.M. services, then, depends on the local people.

All this explanation is by way of making clear my understanding that a good national N.C.C.M. convention speaks well for its officers and staff; it does not necessarily mean that every affiliated diocesan and parish organization will automatically follow the N.C.C.M. lead. But with that much qualification I must say that I was mightily impressed with this convention, from its recited Masses to its special awards to four Catholic scholars for intellectual achievement.

Delegates came from all over the country, and they found workshops, lectures, and discussion periods on subjects like these: increased participation in the liturgy; Catholic concern in urban development; challenges offered by the population problem; what laymen can do to help in Latin America; the crisis of the emergent nations; the lay apostolate and Christian unity; Church-State relations in the United States—vital subjects all, surely.

To help them in considering these subjects, participants in the N.C.C.M. convention had the thinking of some of the best men in the American Church: Father H. A. Reinhold on the liturgy; Gerard Sherry of the Central California *Register* on the public image of the Church; Monsignor Reynold Hillenbrand on the lay apostolate; Dennis Clark on urban renewal; *America* editor Father Thurston Davis, S.J., on Christian unity; George Hunton, Fathers Raymond Bosler, Trafford P. Maher, S.J., and Rollins E. Lambert on interracial justice; *Social Order's* Father Edward Duff, S.J., on Church and State in America; Robert Hoyt of the *Catholic Reporter* on the question of censorship; and many more, too many for me to list them here.

All in all, the meetings in Pittsburgh seemed to me one more illustration of something important that is happening in American Catholicism. That something is the process by which views and attitudes which a decade ago would have been thought "radical" are now on the way to becoming respectable and accepted in the upper echelons of American Catholic leadership. Even ten years ago, the individual lay Catholic who followed Rome's lead on the social question, on race, on the liturgy and the like was likely to feel quite isolated in Catholic organizations; today he may and often does have a tough time in his own parish or diocese, but on the national level at least what might be called the burden of proof seems to be gradually shifting from his shoulders to those of Catholics who still want to cling to the past.

At Pittsburgh I did not get to hear as many of the other speakers as I would have liked; after staying for the closing banquet, I was particularly disappointed that an overly long program led Bishop Wright to make only a few brief remarks rather than deliver the address he had scheduled. But the speakers I did manage to hear were impressive, and the discussions by the delegates, on and off the floor, spirited; I do not see how the participants could fail to go back to their own dioceses and parishes richer and better informed than when they came.

Here, of course, is the important thing. As I'm sure the officials of the N.C.C.M. would be the first to say, a good convention means little unless the principles and programs arrived at there are put to use on the local level. And this is the hard part, for if national Catholic organizations are now displaying concern on questions like the liturgy, interracial justice, the lay apostolate and the like, pastors and parishioners in many areas remain blithely untouched by such concerns. This is where the work is needed.

For my part in the program, I was asked to speak on "Basic Human Rights," with specific attention to Catholics and interracial justice. In my talk I stressed the growing impatience of American Negroes with the pace of integration, and I closed by quoting a statement made to Catholics on this question by Archbishop Ireland—a strong statement which was made exactly seventy years ago, but which remains completely relevant today.

This, of course, was my point—that there is still, to use Archbishop Ireland's phrase, "work for us to do," and not only on race but on education, the liturgy, the lay apostolate and a host of other questions. I hope conventions like this one mean that we are really going to get on with it.

JAMES O'GARA.

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VIEWED FROM ABROAD

The School Question

It has taken a long time to defeat the ancient prejudice that a Catholic President would be a captive of the hierarchy

by GEORGE H. DUNNE

REPORTS reaching Rome suggest that President Kennedy is under heavy Catholic attack for his refusal to include private schools in his federal aid to education bill. If he had included such a provision he would, of course, be under heavier attack from non-Catholic Americans.

It was inevitable that the issue would arise. Writing from the perspective of an American Catholic in Europe it seems to me that American Catholics should be happy that the President takes the position he does. It has taken a long time to defeat the hoary prejudice that a Catholic in the White House would be a prisoner of Catholic interests and of the Catholic hierarchy. The recent political campaign made it evident that this prejudice still has strong roots. In fact, the narrow margin by which Mr. Kennedy sneaked through was undoubtedly in considerable part due to the strength of this fear. I should think that no Catholic, Democrat or Republican, would wish to see this prejudice strengthened, and there is no doubt that it would be greatly strengthened were the newly elected President to propose the use of federal funds to assist private schools. Whether rightly or wrongly, this would be widely regarded as confirmation of the worst fears of the Norman Vincent Peales and the Baptist Ministerial associations.

The point here is not merely that the President would be hurt politically, but that the Church would be hurt seriously. It is surely in the interest of the Church in the United States that the first Catholic President prove beyond any shadow of doubt that his political judgments are not subject to dictation by the hierarchy. Here in Italy the hierarchy is accustomed to assert a kind of direct political *magisterium* that the American hierarchy has never claimed and that the American people would never tolerate. This is understandable. It is less than a hundred years since the Church in Italy ceased to be a political power directing, as she had for centuries, the political lives of the citizens of the Papal States. Nevertheless, to the non-Italian Catholic the survival of this inclination seems bad both for Italian politics and for the Church. There are many Italian Catholics who feel the same way. It would be as unfortunate as it is unlikely that the American hierarchy, which has a different tradition and which has time and again repudiated any such claim, should succumb to the temptation of political power.

THERE ARE, we know, three methods of dealing with the school question in modern societies. There is the totalitarian way of the *école unique* which makes education a monopoly of the State. This also seems to be the aim of the secularists. There is the democratic way of providing a public school system supported by public funds while leaving private groups entire freedom to establish their own school system out of their private funds. There is the other democratic way of supporting both public and private schools out of public funds on a non-discriminatory basis.

The third way seems a higher realization of democracy. Contrary to Jefferson and to a strong current of American political doctrine which agrees with him, it is not always true that "that government is best which governs least." Nevertheless, it is true that the less control government can impose and the more freedom it can grant without injury to the common good, the farther removed we are from totalitarianism. On this basis it would seem clear that the more government not only permits, but positively assists its citizens to realize their own ideals, the more perfectly it approaches the democratic ideal. Seen in this light the school system which prevails in Ireland and in Canada seems surely the more democratic.

In the United States, however, ever since the development of the public school system, it is the second method which has prevailed. With the exception of

Father George H. Dunne, S.J., a long-time contributor to The Commonweal, is now in Rome.

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a few cases which escaped general attention because they were in inconspicuous rural areas, public funds have not been used for the support of private schools. This has become the accepted system. The historical fact that originally all the schools were church schools, first in the colonies and then in the United States, does not negate the other historical fact that in the course of time the public schools acquired a preferential status.

Along with others, Catholics generally accepted this system. Apart from occasional grumbling about the burden of supporting two systems, they paid their educational taxes as willingly as citizens ever pay taxes and went about building and supporting their own schools as well. One who has observed countries where the faithful have not been accustomed to carry this extra burden cannot avoid feeling that the quality of their Catholicism has been enhanced by the sacrifices American Catholics have had to make. He may even wonder whether in the long run the deeper interests of the faith would be really served by relieving the faithful of the necessity of making that extra and often painful effort. In any event, it is only in recent years, as educational costs have mounted, that a growing sense of injustice has led to increasingly determined efforts to obtain the relief to which many American Catholics feel they are equitably entitled.

They should not forget, however, that in making this demand they are the ones who are advocating a departure from long established American theory and practice. In opposing the demand, President Kennedy, far from adopting a new stance, is simply hewing to the traditional line. This suggests that moderation is called for in criticizing one who does not immediately see that justice and the common good demand an abandonment of that tradition.

THERE IS also a constitutional question involved. Constitutional law is not determined by what any individual, however distinguished, finds in the original document, but by what the Supreme Court finds in, or reads into, or deduces from, that document. The Presidential oath to uphold the Constitution means in fact the Constitution as interpreted by the Supreme Court. Any citizen, including a President or a bishop, is free to disagree with the reasoning and the conclusions of the Court and to try to elicit a different interpretation from the Court; but as long as a current interpretation stands, the Constitution is what the Court says it is.

There is no doubt that in some of its decisions the Court has read into the First Amendment interpretations of the no-establishment clause which go far beyond anything the Founding Fathers understood by separation of Church and State. (This is far from being an innovation in Supreme Court practice. Although it does not follow the same laws, constitutional doctrine, like Christine doctrine, has a history of development and many doctrines have been deduced from the Constitution which the Founding Fathers would not recognize.) The Court itself, apparently giving second thought to the matter, has in later decisions happily withdrawn somewhat from the extreme view it took in the McCollum case. It has, however, been a very limited withdrawal indeed.

There is little doubt in the light of past decisions that the Court would rule out direct aid to private schools. The President is convinced from his reading of the Everson case that it would also rule out loans for school construction. Perhaps he is mistaken. It may be possible to persuade the Court to extend the school-bus theory—of aid to students rather than to the school—to include government loans for school construction; but it would take far more brilliant legal argument than was brought to bear in the McCollum case to achieve this end. In any case, there are ample grounds to justify the President's opinion that the Constitution as presently interpreted would rule out any but the limited kinds of participation his proposed bill already allows. This is, of course, an opinion subject to error. In the event, therefore, that legislation should be passed including such loans, he would be ill advised to veto it. Since the Supreme Court is the final arbiter of constitutional questions, the issue should be settled not by Presidential veto, but by judicial decree.

To most Catholics, and to many non-Catholics, it seems plainly an injustice that they are denied a share of public support. The State has a right to require that children be adequately educated and may tax its citizens to provide facilities for such education. Catholic parents are fulfilling their obligation as citizens by sending their children to schools which provide an adequate education. As free citizens they are exercising their natural and constitutionally protected right to send their children to private schools. So long as such schools meet every educational requirement the State has a right to demand, it seems manifestly unjust that the State should refuse to employ any part of the taxes which it collects from them for educational purposes to support the schools to which they prefer to send their children.

MANY AMERICANS fail to see things in this light, and not all of them are motivated by anti-Catholic prejudice. Some of them suffer from the fallacious notion that only public schools are compatible with democracy. Others argue that the State has an obligation only to provide public schools open to all. If a citizen by his own free choice declines to send his children to them he cannot complain of injustice if as a result he has to build his own school. Still others feel that by using public tax funds for

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Catholic schools the non-Catholic taxpayer is being forced to contribute to the support of a system in which he does not believe. There are, of course, answers to these arguments, but it must be recognized that they are sincerely held.

It must also be recognized that the argument about justice is not so plainly conclusive as to permit one to question the good faith of those who do not agree. Citizens may without injustice be required to pay taxes for services they do not choose to use. People without cars pay taxes to build highways. People without children pay taxes to support public schools. People who do not go out at night pay taxes to light public streets. These facts somewhat cloud the argument that it is unjust to oblige parents of private school children to support the public schools. It is true that they are exercising a right in sending their children to private schools, but people who do not go out at night are also exercising a right.

More conclusive is the contention that the democratic ideal is better realized in a society which not only recognizes the right of parents to send their childen to religiously oriented schools, but helps them to do so by equitably devoting part or all of their educational tax to that purpose. The appeal for inclusion of private schools in a program of public support is a plea for a fuller realization of democracy more than an argument about justice.

Those who make this appeal are fully within their rights as citizens in urging both the justice of their cause and their opinion about its constitutionality. However, they will achieve their ends only when they have succeeded in creating a climate of public opinion favorable to them. Unless such a climate has first been achieved it is extremely unlikely that a bill including aid to private schools would be passed by Congress, and less likely that it would survive attack in the Supreme Court.

Considerable progress has been made in creating such a climate. Some two and a half years ago more than a hundred leaders of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish thought from all parts of the country spent a week in New York discussing various problems relating to religion and society. It was surprising to discover how many non-Catholic leaders are already convinced both of the justice and the constitutionality of tax aid to private schools; how many others have open minds on the subject; and how many others, if not yet willing to be persuaded, are willing to discuss the subject amicably. Among the first group Will Herberg, for instance, argues the constitutionality and justice of such aid with great learning and cogency, although he also holds that it would be self-defeating folly to urge the issue with intransigence before public opinion was ready to support it.

It would be disastrous to dissipate this fund of growing understanding. This would surely be the result if Catholics, rather than accept present defeat of their wishes, forced the defeat of any educational bill. It would also be the result if it is made to appear that the President's Catholicism is somehow involved. Mr. Kennedy should certainly not be required "as a Catholic" to support this measure. For Catholics to suggest this is to play directly into the hands of their own real enemies, the Bible Belt Baptists and the Blanshard-type secularists.

EVIDENTLY there have already been whispers questioning the quality of Mr. Kennedy's Catholicism. They have even crossed the seas. Yesterday I read the manuscript of an article written for an Italian magazine which made snide comments about the President's own public school background by way of insinuating that there was a kind of "bar sinister" in his educational background which casts a shadow over his Catholicism. It is not without irony that this article was written in a country which the Church likes to think of as Catholic but whose Catholic schools not only receive no State support, but are even denied exemption from taxation.

This kind of criticism is obviously grist to Mr. Blanshard's mill. It is also wholly unjustified. As a Catholic all that is required of Mr. Kennedy is that he obey his conscience and uphold the Constitution. This seems to be precisely what he is doing. There is nothing in the Catholic conscience which obliges him to hold an opinion different from the one that he now defends.

There are a number of views which a President might honestly hold on this question without in any way doing violence to a Catholic conscience. He might remain sincerely unconvinced of the injustice of denying tax assistance to private schools; though persuaded of the injustice, he might feel that, in the absence of a general consensus, the common good required that Catholics not insist upon their right; he might hold that, whatever the question of justice, such aid was prohibited by constitutional law; he might believe that both justice and the common good would be served and the Constitution not impaired by granting such aid. The point here is not which of these views is correct. The point is that none of them, honestly held, violates a Catholic conscience.

It is to be hoped that in the polemics about this subject the arguments be made with charity, moderation and patience. Catholics who feel intensely a sense of injustice might be helped to restrain their anger by reflecting upon how much better their interests are served in "Protestant" America than in certain "Catholic" countries. The situation in Italy has already been described. In France the bitter struggle that has long gone on over this question has poisoned the political

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atmosphere and made the Church more enemies than friends. Not long ago the sagacious Father Bruckberger, O.P., who from years of residence has come to know the United States almost as well as he knows France, warned American Catholics against repeating the French experience.

From any broad point of view it must be regarded as fortunate that President Kennedy has taken the position he has. It should do much to lay the ghost of the genuine fear of many non-Catholic Americans that a Catholic President must necessarily take orders from the Catholic hierarchy. This in turn should enable the same non-Catholic to recognize that when the Catholic hierarchy urges its views and seeks to rally legislative support for what it considers a legitimate Catholic interest, as it is presently doing, it is not using ecclesiastical power to dictate public policy, but simply exercising the right which all citizens enjoy in a free society to further their ends through the democratic processes of argument and persuasion.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Visit to a Small Satellite

by GABRIEL GERSH

REPORTING behind the Iron Curtain is an uncertain business. When is a spy not a spy? In the eyes of a Communist regime an anti-Communist journalist operating on Western principles is always a spy, if the cases of Dana Adams Schmidt, A. M. Rosenthal and others are any guide. The exception, of course, is when he is in the country under the protection of a Communist-sponsored international conference of some kind. Then practically everything is allowed.

I attended the tenth session of the World Council of Peace in Bucharest not long ago, and arranged to break my return journey at Prague for a few days. A Western journalist who is in a People's Democracy under the auspices of such an organization is treated almost as if he were one of the sympathetic guests or delegates. This means that in a city like Bucharest he lives from the outset in a world within a world, sheltered by a variety of effective devices from the normal inconveniences, shortages and hardships of life in Rumania. For instance, so many cars and buses are available to the conference's guests and delegates that it is easy to overlook the appalling price of taxis (about $1 a mile) and their decrepit condition.

The journalist does not always enjoy all the delegates' privileges. In this case Western journalists paid for their hotel rooms and food, which at the current rate of exchange cost them about $21 a day at a standard of living which in any Western European capital would cost much less. Delegates and guests from abroad, however, seldom pay for anything on these occasions. They stay in the best hotels, eat excellently prepared meals accompanied by the choicest wines and brandies, and hand over vouchers in exchange. They are taken to see (and the journalists with them) all the best sights, to gala concerts, the ballet, to factories. It is not surprising they go home convinced that life in a People's Democracy is a dream come true.

Friendly young interpreter-guides are always at one's elbow. Two Ministry officials were permanently on duty at the journalists' hotel, a second-rate place called the Palace; the ratio of interpreters to journalists was very nearly one to one throughout our stay. Yet it must be said that the supervision was never total. We were allowed to go off on our own if we wanted, and naturally we took advantage of the opportunity. But the Foreign Ministry was right not to be unduly worried about it. There is a double barrier between the outside world and the population; the first is the language barrier, but this is not insurmountable since many Rumanians, especially the older people, know French and German. The second barrier, the Rumanians' fear of the consequences of being seen or heard talking privately to a foreigner, is much harder to overcome.

THERE WAS often something a trifle saddening about the official visits arranged for us. We saw such things as a printers' apprentice school, a modern worker's apartment, a "House of Culture," an electrical equipment factory, and even the big new steel plant built on the edge of Bucharest, which few Western diplomats have been allowed to visit. Our guides, who in most cases I felt were Rumanians first and Marxists second, were bursting with pride over these achievements. Set against anything equivalent in Western Europe, they were quite modest, and it was impossible not to have some sympathy for their pride.

Mr. Gersh, a previous contributor to The Commonweal, recently returned from an extended stay in Europe.

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Bucharest by daylight looks decidedly drab. There are few private cars in the streets, though there are scores of Russian-made Pobedas on government service, and the police have a fleet of British cars. Uniformed soldiers and police are everywhere. The slogans, the portraits and the reiteration of "Long live . . ." either the republic, brotherhood with the Soviet Union, peace, or some other cause, assail one at every bus station. One also notices not only the whole of the Rumanian politburo but the Soviet as well adorning the airport, the government buildings and even the theaters.

But there was not the positive oppression that I later discovered in Prague. Wars and political regimes cannot change the beauty of Bucharest with its open air restaurants, well laid-out parks and elegant theaters. On the Calea Victoriei, the Fifth Avenue of Bucharest, one notices that the quality of the goods in shops is fairly good and that many of the women are smartly dressed. (Undoubtedly, the spring sunshine and the bright colors of light clothing always help to make things look better than they are.)

The facade, in fact, is not without its attractions, and the younger generation seems on the surface relatively contented. But there are many things that are strange. Why is it impossible to buy a street map of the city? It is difficult to get used to seeing young women carrying hods of bricks or wheeling barrowloads of cement on building sites. Nor does the large number of empty, closed shops add to the gaiety. They are closed because taxation and inefficiency (as our interpreters explained it) have driven their former owners into shop collectives. One big shop, under State control, so the theory goes, is better than a dozen private shops competing with each other.

Food and clothing in Bucharest's shops cost, in relation to average earnings, roughly two or three times as much as in most Western European countries. A man earning the equivalent of $25 a week pays between $15 and $25 for a pair of shoes, $75 for a worsted suit, and at least $1.50 for a modest restaurant meal. A bar of toilet soap, I noticed, costs fifty cents. Fortunately, most workers save money on the midday factory canteen meal, and the family budget is rescued from disaster by controlled low rents. Life is undoubtedly hard for all but the best-paid workers and the usual "priviligentsia."

In the eyes of the West the greatest crime committed by the present regime is the deportation from Bucharest in the past several years of many thousands of people—some estimates are as high as 40,000—to the remote country districts on the nation's periphery. When I reproached Mihai Podoleanu, a young Rumanian Communist writer whose father was a well-known satirist, for this inhumanity, he retorted that the figures had been grossly exaggerated. "We have deported people who were former supporters of the old regime," he said. "You must remember we have a dictatorship of the proletariat here. We needed rooms for workers. Why shouldn't we send away old people who did not work, were hoarding food and stirring up discontent, and give their apartments to workers?"

THE MOST injudicious thing our guides did was to take the Western journalists to watch a mass rally on behalf of the Peace Movement in Bucharest Stadium. About 75,000 men and women had been marched into the stadium, carrying pale blue banners, Rumanian flags and peace slogans. The immense throng of people for the most part stood silent and apathetic. At appropriate moments in the speech-making some well-placed cheer leaders aroused applause, but they did not manage to infuse any spirit into the occasion.

Once aboard the plane for Prague I was no longer under the "Peace" protection of the Rumanian government. A few delegates who had traveled with me were whisked off in shiny black Tratraplan cars, but I, once more an ordinary member of the public again, waited over an hour for the bus to the town terminal. I had an apprehensive feeling that I would have to be rather more careful about the kind of questions I should ask here. Would I be spying, I wondered, if I recorded the price of a bicycle in my little notebook? Would that be economic sabotage?

I had last stayed in Prague in the summer of 1947, nine months before the Communist coup. It was then recovering quickly from its wartime occupation, and it had the normal animation of a Central European city.

But since then the city has experienced thirteen years of Communist government, with purges, political trials and shortages. Even with this in mind, it was an appalling shock to see the people of Prague trudging through the streets. It was as if a grey blight had fallen on the city. No one was actually in rags, yet nobody was noticeably smart. Bucharest the previous week had looked almost gay by comparison. The streets in the center of the city were full of people walking in an aimless way, gazing at windows, doing very little buying, their faces expressionless, their emotions concentrated inwardly.

The first impression was confirmed by arrival at the Alcorn Hotel. Just off the Wenceslas Square, this was once Prague's smartest, most expensive and most comfortable hotel. It is still the most expensive and is used by foreigners, but it is no longer in the luxury category. The service is slipshod, the cooking is mediocre and the rooms are uncomfortable.

A long walk around the shops disclosed that life is slightly more expensive in Prague than in Bucharest, in relation to wages. A man who is earning about $30 a week (the average wage) pays about $12 for a shirt,

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$30 for a cheap suit and nearly forty cents for a glass of what is fortunately still the best and strongest beer in Europe. Undoubtedly, there are many people earning more than the average wage who find it difficult to make ends meet; and it seems likely that the major effect of the reorganization of wage rates, which is now being discussed with official enthusiasm in factories all over the country, will be to force most people to work harder to maintain their present wages.

THE DOUBLE barrier mentioned earlier, of language and of apprehensiveness, was more easily broken here than in Bucharest. The Czechs not only looked more discontented than the Rumanians with the system, but they were also more ready to grumble, being less familiar than the Rumanians with the techniques and application of thought control. I got aboard a tram, offered a handful of small change to the middle-aged conductor, and said, "Do you speak English?" He shook his head. "Deutsch?" I paid my fare, and as I did so he muttered, "How do you find it here?" Everyone looks poor and unhappy," I muttered back. He wandered off to the other end of the tram to take some more fares. A moment later he was beside me again. "We are all poor here," he said in a low voice. "We cannot go on. We hope your President will save us." He went off again, but returned later. "What can the President do?" I asked. The little conductor shrugged. "He will see Macmillan and de Gaulle; they will all do something," he murmured. I got off the train, and gave him a little wave as it moved on.

Another encounter in this style was in a fourth-class restaurant, where I happened to be the only customer at the time. The elderly manager's wife said: "If only you had known Prague before. At least we could grumble then. Now we can only wait and hope."

Prague is a city of rumors and unconfirmed assertions, as always when the diplomatic missions have no informal contacts with the populace. Members of the Prague embassies and legations of all but the Communist countries have the greatest difficulty in obtaining information. Unlike their opposite numbers in Bucharest, however, diplomats in Czechoslovakia can, save for a few restricted areas, travel where they please. They are usually followed by police cars, though not invariably. The police discover their whereabouts once they have registered at a provincial hotel. I met at least one diplomat (not American) who always carries a tent in his car and camps out at nights when he is touring around the country, so that he does not have to register at an hotel. He does this quite ostentatiously, with a bright yellow tent, at the roadside. It happens to be one of the things that is still legal.

Foreign diplomats who have lived for a few years in Prague detect few, if any, signs of political change. Indeed one notices with dismay the absence of any thaw, the silence of the intellectuals, the turgid dullness of the Czech press and the general slowness of the "de-Stalinization" of the regime—if the process can really be said to have begun at all.

The Czech Communists still maintain their power through the feared secret police and try to protect it through the exclusion of dangerous thoughts (with some odd exceptions like the Vienna television programs that can be picked up in parts of the south). Most foreign books and newspapers are banned; foreign travel is restricted to a few loyal government officials and diplomats; and curfews are enforced in several towns near the Austrian frontier. As for art and literature, the party has made it clear that they must remain firmly in the service of the state. Social realism—"the portrayal of the real conflicts of life," a young Communist writer told me—still sets the tone of Czech culture and signs of any drift toward bourgeois forms in art are severely suppressed.

The overriding impression of ten days in two "People's Democracies" is that the death of Stalin and the apparent change of attitude in Moscow towards the West have meant no change at all for those who live under Communist oppression in Rumania and Czechoslovakia. These satellites seem to have been to a large extent missed by the tide of excitement which has swept over most of the other "People's Democracies" of Eastern Europe in the past few years.

Mihai Podoleanu's grim words still ring in my ears. "Don't forget," he said, "that we have a dictatorship of the proletariat here." I shall not easily forget the mark it can leave on the faces of those whom it controls.

MAPLES IN A SPRUCE FOREST

They live by attenuation,
Straining, vine-thin,
Up to gaps their gold leaves crowd
Like drowning faces surfacing.

Wherever dappled sun persists,
Shy leaves work photosynthesis;
Until I saw these slender doomed,
I did not know what a maple is.

The life that plumps the oval
In the open meadow full
Is beggared here, distended toward
The dying light available.

Maturity of sullen spruce
Murders these deciduous;
A little while, the fretted gloom
Is dappled with chartreuse.

JOHN UPDIKE.

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Reader to Rider

by GERALD WEALES

"O where are you going?" said reader to rider
—W. H. Auden.

ALL THAT I can remember of the movie version of Rider Haggard's *She* that I saw as a boy are two scenes—the first breathtaking glimpse of She encased in ice and a marvelous ice slide that must have come toward the end of the film. I have not been in love with Ayesha since then, as Andrew Lang said he was from the moment he read the book, but the two scenes do seem to be embedded in my mind.

Recently, the novel has taken to winking at me from the shelves of paperback bookstores—where it seems always to be in a double volume with *King Solomon's Mines*—suggesting that at the cost of a few cents and a few hours I might be ten again; but no Victorian lady—not even one who has lived more than two thousand years—is going to pick me up in a bookstore. Still those psychic powers that used to work their way into Haggard's books seem to have been at work. Here, suddenly, is Morton N. Cohen's biography of She's creator *(Rider Haggard.* Walker and Co. $6.) and I have a good, a valid, a reviewer's excuse to read *She* and to move on to some of the Allan Quartermain tales.

No ice, of course. Ayesha never got within a continent's distance of ice. Cohen quotes a letter that Rudyard Kipling wrote to Haggard in which he says, "I can't imagine how the tale could be adequately presented—even by all the means known to film-fakers." One way, apparently, would be to take that fascinating column of fire in which Ayesha found and then lost her unchanging youth and beauty and turn it into a house-high ice cube. Unless of course my memory is playing tricks and I have mixed my Saturday afternoons. I suspect not. Within recent memory I have seen Deborah Kerr looking for King Solomon's mines, even though the narrator of that story makes quite clear "that there is not a *petticoat* in the whole history." My confrontation with Rider Haggard, then, is rather different from that of the usual critic who finds that reading the books reawakens his boyhood; mine is an initial meeting and a reading of the genuine article has exploded my celluloid past.

Mr. Weales, a frequent contributor, is a member of the faculty of the University of Pennsylvania.

Although I lost my ice slide, I gained something in the exchange. Reading *She, King Solomon's Mines* and *Allan Quartermain* turned out to be fun. I cannot pretend that I was transported, that I imagined myself actually involved in the adventures as I might have been as a child and as many of Haggard's adult readers apparently have been; his books may be "magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn," but I—like Keats in that poem—just sat at the window looking out. Sat and enjoyed myself. The tap of Pew's stick can pull me immediately into *Treasure Island,* can set me to packing my sea chest (but I packed that chest of old); with Haggard I am content to let Quartermain and Sir Henry and Captain Good have the adventures, fight the battles, save the maidens, but there is such vitality in the having, the fighting and the saving that I find myself a quite content observer.

NOT THAT ALL the fun is intentional. Haggard, like so many of the popular writers of his day (Hall Caine, for instance), was interested in the Big Questions, in the Meaning of Life, and, as Cohen points out, despite the protests of friends and reviewers he could not keep from stopping in the middle of his stories to let his narrator or his characters ponder such matters. The ponderings are often interesting, not intrinsically, but as indications of popular—if not quite conventional—ideas that were current in English literary circles in the late nineteenth century; in *She* particularly, there are many reflections of the Victorian concern with psychic phenomena.

The mixture of adventure and admonition was a popular one—as late as 1909, Conan Doyle was mixing spiritualism and Archer's Camel Corps in his play *The Fires of Fate*—but now it has become quaint, at least in its Victorian guise; today, psychological and existential jargon passes for wisdom. There is charm for us, then, in the juxtaposition of quasi-philosophic rumination with swinging battleaxes and flaming bodies, in interrupting the action to offer a polite bromide. Haggard, of course, was serious about all this. In a single sentence Cohen manages to sum up the novelist's intention and to imply the effect on us: "Too often he tells us that life is sad and then stops to admire his sagacity."

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It is easier for us to take these long, long thoughts from Allan Quartermain, who insists that he is a plain, blunt man (an English-African version of our homely philosopher), but they are particularly impossible in the mouths of Holly, the university-don variation on Allan, and of Ayesha, who is centuries old and who moved in philosophical circles before she retired to Kôr. Even Haggard's contemporaries were not universally enchanted with She's wisdom; Cohen quotes W. E. Henley, who called her "the heroic Barmaid—the Waitress in Apotheosis" and paraphrases Ouida, who "thought her banalities made her sound like a young woman in Kensington."

From time to time in the biography, Cohen lines up Haggard's contemporary admirers—C. S. Lewis, Henry Miller, Graham Greene, Stuart Cloete—and asks them to speak their piece. Although all of them find something to admire in Haggard, I doubt that any of them would claim that he is a serious novelist. Certainly Cohen makes no such claim, nor should he. At best, Haggard is a story-teller with a fantastic imagination and a taste for slaughter and the supernatural; at worst, he is a nattering bore. Some of the best things in Cohen's book turn up in the chapter "The Story-Teller" in which he examines the way the romancer works, his virtues and his defects. Although I have barely scratched the surface of Haggard's vast fictional output, I usually find myself in agreement with the expert who has—poor man—come to know all fifty-eight volumes.

On one point, however, I think that Cohen is wrong. In attempting to explain the appeal of Haggard's works, despite their defects, Cohen hits upon Haggard's sense of story, his "strong dramatic unity." In one sense, the books may be "cohesive entities, with beginnings, middles, and ends"; they do start with a decision to go on some quest or other—to find eternal life, secret treasure, a lost city—and they end, ordinarily, when the lost is found, and lost again. The books, however, are not intricately plotted; there is no real dramatic movement from one event to the next. Of course, Haggard plants in early chapters material that will turn up later, perhaps significantly, but the stories are not compelling in the sense that one action sets off the next.

She, which is decidedly inferior to *King Solomon's Mines* on these grounds, is a case in point. If Haggard had written that book with a real respect for story, it would have been one-third its length. The sickness of Leo and Ayesha's reluctance to cure him, although it is plainly in her power, is not a plot device, but an anti-plot device. Haggard, as usual, wants to interrupt his story for travelogue and treatise, to take the readers on a tour of the ancient city of Kôr and to allow Holly and Ayesha to discuss Life. It is pretty much a matter of taste whether or not one likes the interruptions (I am tempted to say, oh, get on with it), but admirable or not, they are hardly designed to sweep the reader to an inevitable end.

Sometimes exciting events—the elephant hunt in *King Solomon's Mines*—are quite beside the point of the story (which reminds me that I am not at all sure what the main story is in that book). "And when we close the cover of the book," says Cohen of any of the best Haggard words, "we do not feel that this has been a shapeless series of incidents ending with arbitrary success or failure." Of course, that is exactly what I do feel. In Haggard, the story seems to be simply a line on which he hangs a number of separate scenes, and the myth-quest kind of tale serves this purpose well. I will go along with Cohen in praise of Haggard's fertile invention, but the vivid pictures that come to me from the novels are held together only by the most rudimentary sense of continuity.

ONE EVIDENCE—it may be a cause or an effect—of Haggard's concern for the part at the expense of the whole is the preponderance of accident in his books. Chance, I suppose, is necessary to any writer of romances—the unmotivated detonator that sets off the explosive events that beguile us. For that reason, I can take without turning a hair the fortunate shipwreck of Leo and Holly (all hands lost to get them out of the way) which practically dumps them into She's lap, and the current that pulls the adventurers into the underground river and finally to the city they seek in *Allan Quartermain.* Too often, however, the transitions suggest that Haggard has said all he possibly can about one action, or inaction, and wants to get on to the next. In *King Solomon's Mines,* for instance, when the three men are trapped in the treasure room, we are given several pages of hope abandoned, and then Allan suddenly realizes that they are breathing fresh air and that there must be an exit.

More often than not, it seems to me, a scene in a Haggard book comes to an end because he is finished with it, not because it is finished. This is particularly true of the passages in which the heroes suffer great hardship. His characters are often faced with extreme heat or cold, with thirst, with hunger, with fatigue, and their sufferings are generally relieved when the author recognizes that he is faced with either rescue or repetition. One device that he likes is to let the narrator pass out, as Allan occasionally does in battle and as the whole party does in the boat on the underground river.

Trickery is necessary to adventure books, of course, but it is important that the reader never see the author's hand; more than once, while reading Haggard, I was reminded of the *Road* picture—*Road to Morocco,* I think it was—in which a scene that shows Crosby and Hope tightly bound is followed immediately by one that shows them free of their bonds; Hope turns directly into the camera and says to the audience, "I bet you

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wonder how we got loose." Haggard gives the reader too many opportunities to wonder.

The Rider Haggard biography unfortunately has some of the faults of the Haggard novels. Although Cohen is well aware of Haggard's difficulty with organization, he seems to have problems of that nature himself. The subject is partly to blame. Once Haggard became successful as a romancer, he turned out books as though he were working on an assembly line. After the initial excitement of *King Solomon's Mines* and *She,* the works came indifferently from Haggard's pen and Cohen can find nothing particular to say about most of them or the work that went into them. About all he can do is conjure up a picture of Haggard, shut in his study, writing or dictating a certain number of words a day; there is nothing fascinating about the making of romances when the process is as routine a one as Haggard made it.

The early chapters of the biography—particularly the one about Haggard's life in Africa—are interesting as narratives. Once Haggard is back in England and has begun his literary career, Cohen abandons chronology and settles for descriptions of Haggard as lord of the manor, as agricultural reformer, as friend (to Lang and Kipling mainly), as public servant. Given its subject, the book could not be the "exciting new biography" that the jacket promises; it could and does have other virtues. The material on African politics in the seventies and on the rural depression in England at the end of the century is extremely interesting. Strangely enough, the parts of the book having to do with Haggard as a literary figure are less so. Quotations from reviews, bits from letters about proofs and profits, even the whisper of a literary controversy are there, but they do not add up to much.

ALTHOUGH, like any writer, Haggard wanted to be praised, he never really thought of himself as a literary man. The biography reads as though Cohen, who came to Haggard through the novels, reached the same conclusion, came to find him much more interesting as a man than as a writer. For this reason, the book is a little disappointing if one expects a detailed picture of a writer in relation to his work and his public. Cohen assumes apparently that we will be so little interested in the man's work as a whole that he fails to provide a list of Haggard's books; his bibliography is so selective that it does not even list all the novels that are mentioned in the text.

Rider Haggard may not be quite the book that I hoped it would be when I opened it, but it does provide a picture of the big, sad, busy man who preferred being an English gentleman, "the highest rank whereto we can attain," to being a writer, and who worked diligently at being a writer so that he could afford to be an English gentleman.

THE STAGE

THE CONTEMPORARIES

IF THE Mr. Hugh Wheeler of "Big Fish, Little Fish" *(at the ANTA Playhouse)* and the Tennessee Williams of "Period of Adjustment" but tentatively show virtue her own feature and scorn her own image —sharing with us all, doubtless, the metaphysical uncertainty—they have yet obliquely held a mirror to nature, and rendered the form and pressure of the time with a fidelity singular among recent manifestations of dramatic energy. Mr. Williams' *mezzo del cammino* piece is no longer about, betrayed by the inconstancy of a public—critical as well as lay—which is always busily issuing directions to the artist and then, when he takes finally the diverging road in that yellow wood, refusing to follow him.

One must mourn the loss of "Period of Adjustment" for its classical comic order, its modulations of obsession into compassionate irony, above all, for that brilliance of actuality—solidity of specification, James might have called it—which is so rarely a habit of the American imagination. I am inclined to think "Period of Adjustment" at once Mr. Williams' most *coherent* work—however minor we may regard it in our aesthetic pedantry—and a permanent contribution to our meager store of substantiated and informed dramatic wit: standing, for all its radical dissimilarity, in much the same relation to the native American tradition as does Miss Enid Bagnold's "The Chalk Garden" to the lineage of English stage comedy.

"Big Fish, Little Fish" is the work of a new talent, yet compels much of the same admiration, and for comparable reasons. Mr. Hugh Wheeler has hitherto written only detective fictions under a pseudonym—*incognito,* it would seem, *ergo sum*—and it is diverting to speculate how much expertise his pursuit of the hound of the Baskervilles has lent to his chase after no less elusive a quarry. For "Big Fish, Little Fish" is delighting less by virtue of any magnitude of scope, than by its *pointilliste* verity of observation: this almost tactile sense we have of the *person* distilled from a thousand broken, fleeting shards of his character and manners. Doubtless now, to those whose interest in human personality is confined to ideological or didactic demonstration, such pleasures and preoccupations will seem trifling indeed, a mug's game: I sensed some of this fatigued condescension in the critical response to "Period of Adjustment." And yes: Aristotle assures us the poet as novice will usually excel first in portraiture, before he masters the more complex imitation of action.

Yet equally—from Morningside Heights, as it were, to Olympus—Mr. Lionel Trilling reminds us that the writer's perception of manners is a function of his love.

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And intelligent charity is the animation of "Big Fish, Little Fish" and "Period of Adjustment." For it is not difficult, after all, to *announce* profundity: does not, to draw from another art, Mr. Ingmar Bergman's film of *The Seventh Seal* do just this? Yet hypnotized by that audacity, may not the more consummate aesthetic reality of his other *Smiles of a Summer Night*—so frivolous, so *personal*—elude us, just as it does so often in Chaucer: all those portraits, those details: what do they *mean?*

There are two salient aspects of "Big Fish, Little Fish" and, with more or less emphasis, "Period of Adjustment," that seem to me to have been insufficiently remarked. I refer first to the authentic freshness of Mr. Wheeler's material. In my experience of the theater, I have spent evenings without end exploring the decayed suburb, the motel, the Texas porch, the Brooklyn tenement—in shattered company with the misguided, mismatched, morose—yet into this world Mr. Wheeler surveys with such compassionate rigor—this shabby-genteel ambiance of *déclassé* New York intellectuals, full of a kind of acrid poetry of failure, and felt, as Mr. Harold Clurman remarks, with that crepuscular tenderness, stabbing, as of the city in a rainy autumn twilight —into this world of more social consequences than we might care to confess, I can recollect few dramatic ventures. And if this seems in me a kind of Manhattan chauvinism, I must observe that only to the provincial will such pleasure in the shock of recognition seem itself provincial.

Equally, what has been denied an adequate praise is the mode of acting developed to render just such experience. We are susceptible, that small quarter of us in whom the relish for *performance* is voracious—to the amplitude and finish of French gesture, the expressiveness of Italian lyricism, British suavity and romanticism, the nostalgia, violence and rhetoric of the new 'dustbin' school. Yet only the injustice of snobbism could permit one to deny the brilliance of American *verismo* a place of honor with these. Miss Barbara Baxley and Miss Rosemary Murphy, as an instance, are not poster queens, and will never—for ill or good —be goddesses beached on the mythic shores of their own infallibility: but they gave, in "Period of Adjustment," performances of an intent, persuasion, inflected beat and constant fine edge of surprise that I shall not forget. Nor were Mr. Robert Webber, shivering over his marital anxieties, and Mr. James Daly, who has rarely had more to do than light a Camel on television, far behind them. And to watch Mr. Hume Cronyn stalking about the Murray Hill apartment of "Big Fish, Little Fish" in his underwear, for all the world like an exasperated goat: crooning Dostoevsky, lecturing a disenchanted pussycat (who suffers from fur-balls) on her dashed hopes of becoming an heiress, or snarling at a friend who has turned ingrate ("And to think of all the Philharmonic tickets I wasted on you!"); to be privy to Mr. Martin Gabel's rumbling hauteur and immitigable bulk as he details his views on sexual periodicity; to relish how the alien—and for that reason, perhaps, more alert—eye of Sir John Gielgud has marked this skein of life with so much brio and exactitude: all of this is again to restore us not only to a substantial joy in human individuality, but to the deeper sense of that specific ground of experience in which all art, however starry and mastering its ultimate flight, must finally be rooted.

Only a few performances remain to witness Sir Laurence Olivier, as Henry II in the Anouilh "Becket," giving an exhibition of heroic and incandescent bravura: so beg, borrow, steal. And the Phoenix "Hamlet," curiously compelling though one could fault each of its individual strokes, is also in its last weeks.

RICHARD HAYES.

THE SCREEN

THE TROUBLE WITH MIMOSA

CERTAINLY one of the world's most beautiful cities, San Francisco is shown off at its glittering best in the lovely Technicolor photography of in "The Pleasure of His Company." Producer William Perlberg and director George Seaton must have realized that the screenplay, written by Samuel Taylor from the stage play by Taylor and Cornelia Otis Skinner, is indeed pretty thin material for a two-hour movie, so they decorated their production handsomely—with a plethora of shots of the sparkling city on the bay photographed by Robert Burks, with a stunning set of the mansion in which most of the action (or talk, really) takes place, and with a good-looking cast wearing striking clothes designed by Edith Head.

What "The Pleasure of His Company" needs is a plot. It has plenty of witty lines put over nicely by the amusing cast, but after a while the skimpy fabric shows through the fluff, just as it does with the film's main character whose company is such a pleasure—up to a point. Fred Astaire plays this role of Pogo Poole, world traveler and dilettante, with all the Astair charm, but eventually anyone with any sense must realize that Pogo makes other people look like trudging ants while he is the carefree, happy grasshopper.

Pogo's former wife, played with delightful style by Lilli Palmer, sees through him and is worried to death when he suddenly shows up to give away their daughter at the forthcoming wedding. Of course the daughter (Debbie Reynolds) is taken in by this charming father she hasn't seen for some twenty years; and what story there is hinges on the situation that arises when her

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father, who has a gift for making people dissatisfied with their lot, tries to talk her out of marrying the likable but hard-working young rancher (Tab Hunter) so she can see the world under papa's guidance.

Needless to say, the young rancher and Lilli's husband (Gary Merrill) are not enchanted by Pogo's charms, but Lilli's father (Charlies Ruggles), who likes a good joke when he sees one, cheers from the sidelines and hopes everything will come out for the best. Perhaps, since charm is such an elusive thing, the movie was wise to end differently from the play. Anyway, it is obvious from the beginning that time and age are Pogo's enemies—or, as Lilli puts it: "That's the trouble with mimosa; it dries up."

PETER USTINOV, who hasn't been around as long as Fred Astaire but is even more adept at portraying charm, also tries his hand at maneuvering young people in a romantic situation. In "Romanoff and Juliet," however, he wants to bring the boy and girl together, not separate them, and his scheming is not so much for himself as in the interests of international good will. In the practically unknown country of Concordia, where General Ustinov heads the armed forces, such as they are, and everything else, he promotes a permanent alliance between the daughter (Sandra Dee) of the American ambassador and the son (John Gavin) of the Russian ambassador.

As the General, the indefatigable Mr. Ustinov not only runs the military, romantic, diplomatic and conniving departments of Concordia, but he also runs the whole movie—since he served as its producer, director, scriptwriter and author of the original play on which it is based. This may account for the fact that "Romanoff and Juliet" is a little tired and not quite as funny as Mr. Ustinov hopes. It kids international diplomacy, Soviet as well as American, which well deserves the ribbing; but most of its humor is unsubtle and some of it even old-hat. After its brilliant opening scene at the U.N. (in which Ustinov's voice shouts out the yes's and no's for all the nations), the film's satire starts running downhill; and while some of the burlesques in Concordia, where the Americans and Russians are working overtime to woo this impoverished little country that caused the tie at the U.N. are very amusing, the comedy as a whole wears itself out long before the finale.

Actor Ustinov is inclined to ham it up a bit, but even his ham has charm; and he is well supported by Akim Tamiroff and John Phillips as the two ambassadors. Filmed in Italy in Technicolor, "Romanoff and Juliet" looks good and, like the circus, may win audiences of all ages with its clowning, slapstick diplomacy and innocuous romance. Admirers of "The Mouse That Roared," however, may find Ustinov's circus just second-best.

IT IS the younger generation which maneuvers its elders in "The Parent Trap," the younger generation, that is, as played by Hayley Mills. This fourteen-year-old daughter of actor John Mills displayed so much talent in the English "Tiger Bay" and in Walt Disney's "Pollyanna" that Mr. Disney has entrusted her with two roles in his latest production—and Hayley is practically the whole show, portraying twins who were separated years ago when their parents were divorced. When the two meet at a girls' summer camp, neither knows who the other is and both are repelled, because they look so much alike and yet are so temperamentally different: the proper, lady-like one was raised by her mother and maternal grandparents in Boston, and the tomboyish one was brought up by her father on his California ranch. But when the girls realize they're sisters, they become very palsy and cook up a mischievous plot to bring their parents together again, changing places and each going home to the parent she hardly knows.

Although the outcome of this story is inevitable, and it is shamelessly sentimental at times, David Swift has written such an amusing script (from the German novel *Das Doppelte Lottchen* by Erich Kastner) and has directed his cast so well that "The Parent Trap" becomes a delight from beginning to end. The picture is longer than its story warrants, but it has so many bright touches and the cast seems to be having such a good time with a plot that makes good sense that it would be a shame to cut it.

The cast includes Maureen O'Hara as the girls' beautiful mother, Brian Keith as their manly father, and such capable actors as Leo G. Carroll, Cathleen Nesbitt, Charlie Ruggles, Ruth McDevitt, Una Merkel and others who add sparkle to the many hilarious scenes. But it is Hayley Mills who gives the picture its biggest lift. She doubles in brats; but they're very lovable brats.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

COMMUNICATIONS

"LAYMAN IN THE CHURCH"

Paterson, N. J.

TO THE EDITORS: Three recent contributions to the pages of The Commonweal concerning the role of the layman in the Church were refreshing in that they abstained from the kind of polemics engaged in by many of the writers of popular articles on this subject.

Much of what I read these days reminds me of a national convention of one of the agencies of the N.C.W.C. which I attended a few years ago, where, in one of the major "workshops" of the convention I

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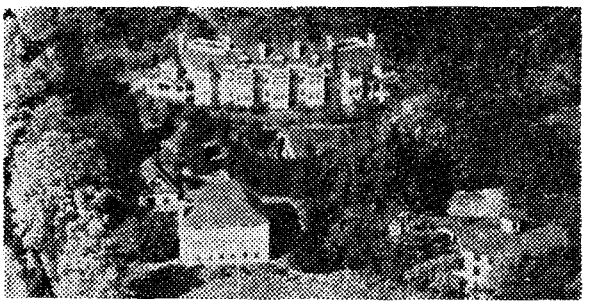

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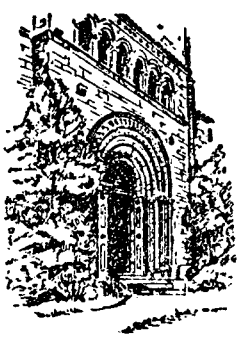

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suddenly found myself in the middle of a serious discussion aimed at solving the problem of whether the laymen present should go home with a sense of an apostolic mission or in the alternative concentrate for a few years on achieving some greater degree of individual perfection before embarking on an apostolic career. The discussion leaders, a panel of priests, actually led the debate over this knotty "problem." That it was anti-Christian to suggest these courses of action in the form of alternatives was largely overlooked. Which brings me to the point of this letter: that the prime need of today's Catholic Layman is a theological perspective on a much broader base than the prevailing one.

It is in this area that the parish as the parish can play a vital role hitherto almost completely ignored. As James O'Gara pointed out recently, we have been utilizing the bulk of our resources on the parish level in the education of people between the ages of six to thirteen. Beyond this point much of the clergy appears to have betrayed the teaching vocation which is theirs. All parishes are comprised of a great majority of persons (on the adult level) with no theological training to speak of. The parish structure provides the ideal vehicle for adult instruction with theology at its heart.

No time, the pastor may cry, but I say make time. Can it be proved that we cannot do without much of the now normal parish activity? Must we center parish life around meeting after meeting embracing endless discussion of picnics, cake sales, parking space for ushers, bingo and the rest of it? Surely there is a hierarchy of values here, and the most compelling reasons for re-shuffling parish activity to conform thereto. Perhaps the day will come when in the normal educational process most Catholics will, as a matter of course, receive formal theological training, (but certainly not in the lifetime of any of us). Until that day informal adult education as the center of all parish activity seems the best answer.

On this basis we must, of course, cry for help to the hierarchy and the rank-and-file clergy. A good beginning, it seems to me, would be to look for the release of many of the good priests now engaged (in any given diocese) in functions that our basically within the layman's competence. JAMES F. COLAIANNI.

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A Bold and Masterful Study of the New Politics

THE NEW POLITICS: AMERICA AND THE END OF THE POSTWAR WORLD. By Edmund Stillman and William Pfaff. Coward McCann. $4.

By KENNETH W. THOMPSON

MOST AMERICANS sense with uncertainty and anxiety the changing nature of present day international politics. Neither the world nor our role in it are the same as in 1947. The latest most startling setback in Cuba symbolized for many the working of forces unleashed beyond our authority and control. The bipolar order dominated by Moscow and Washington is passing and both face a crisis in policy as those they would influence grow increasingly indifferent to their claims. Communist China, Poland and Yugoslavia periodically assert independence from Russia, and France and the neutralist states pit their will against that of the United States. The painful lesson of recent years must be that no one can dictate to the rest of the world.

This transformation of the world, if vaguely perceived by those who follow events, has seldom if ever been as cogently appraised as in *The New Politics*. The authors, Edmund Stillman and William Pfaff, write with mastery, boldness and decisiveness; their study provides analysis, diagnosis and prescription. While they are concerned with issues of contemporary foreign policy, the book is solidly grounded in the best of history, philosophy and theology. It is a treatise on current events cast in a framework that should endure.

In the first instance, the authors deal with the United States, its goals and traditions, and its foreign policy. They maintain that ours is a policy based on a proposition and in this we are unique. Our purpose is to set all men free. Is this practical or does it fall in a realm beyond politics? Does it lead, as Charles de Gaulle said of Franklin D. Roosevelt's program, to "a permanent system of intervention"? Have we moved yet further down this path in containing Communism around the world? The authors are fearful we have and would have the nation redefine and restrict its targets.

Furthermore, they question the choice and use of instruments and policies. "American military aid was made into a kind of political currency, a talisman of United States friendship, and it was distributed impartially—to feuding Asian republics, Latin American dictatorships, and tribal empires in Africa." More than a too excessive concentration on military assistance, our error was in assuming universal responsibility and competence. We came to revel in the possibility of throwing resources onto the scales of each new local crisis. In Secretary of State Dean Rusk's words, our aid has been governed by pressures of the moment—"the need to preserve an alliance or friendship or protect an American military base; or the desire to counter a Communist aid offer or save an economy from imminent collapse." We have found ourselves indiscriminately aligned with the fortunes of factions around the globe who frequently could not survive even with our largesse. Nationalism in countries subjected to American influence would not yield any more than Soviet control in Egypt, Iraq or Yugoslavia could be successful. The United States by multiplying military alliances has weakened, not strengthened, its prospects in an emerging plural world society.

A preoccupation with policies of military and economic aid across a broad spectrum of the world's needs developed after World War II. Then the Soviet Union and the United States emerged as the two great powers relatively unscathed by the ravages of the war. At least, the authors can maintain that "all but two powers had been wrecked by the blind forces of war." To the Communist historian these events were inevitable. The inner logic of the Marxian dialectic guaranteed that the one great Communist society would be supreme. "History has its truth, and there is no balancing it with untruth." The polarization of the world into two great empires had less intellectual foundation for the West. The United States reluctantly, after long years of moral and political isolation from the conflicts of the world, accepted the task of shaping a counter-empire, a benign federation of states marked most by their diversity, that would hold back the Communist flood. Almost imperceptibly, American leaders became fascinated with their task. They raised to the level of dogma a highly complicated response to Soviet expansionism.

The trends in world politics since 1900 had witnessed the growing concentration of power in the hands of a few states. In 1900, the roster had included Imperial Russia, Great Britain, France, Germany, Ottoman Turkey, Austria-Hungary, the United States, and Japan. Their composition heralded the passing of the European Age, for only four were strictly speaking European. By 1946, both of the great centers of power were outside Europe. They saw themselves as the culmination of a historical trend, both having expanded into vast unsettled areas and both with predilection for transcendent political theories and purposive theories of history. Both found themselves naturally accounting for their pre-eminence by stressing the rightness of their cause. The Communist and democratic philosophies provide the explanations.

The thesis of *The New Politics* is that by 1950 "events had begun to pull against this Soviet-American monopoly of politics." History in the long run resists categorical choices. "Where nations once had sought the protection and patronage of the two surviving great powers, or were compelled to accept them when the Cold War began, they now sought roles outside the static pattern of Soviet-American competition." Europeans had talked of "a Third Force" in 1947 but no one envisaged a region de-

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pendent on outside support for its reconstruction as a serious alternative to East or West. By 1956 events in Hungary and Poland and Suez transformed a bipolar into a plural world. They demonstrated the determination of allies on both sides to play an independent role. France under General de Gaulle put stress on restoring its national prestige and position and secondarily its part in European society. Those states like Germany and Japan remaining in American tutelage stirred themselves, and the student demonstrations in Japan in the summer of 1960 may foreshadow the end of dependency there.

The authors argue that the world has been transformed but our understanding lags. They reiterate: "Moscow's primacy is daily challenged by Peking and the states of Eastern Europe assert their individuality. The American alliance system is disintegrating before our eyes. New nations are rising in the world, resisting our claims—ours and the Russians' alike— questioning our purposes, seeking places of their own in the affairs of our times." Nationalism, despite the fond hopes of civilized men for universal goals, is more strongly entrenched, for through the quest for coherent national goals the peoples of Asia and Africa seek self-realization. Its forms and expressions vary but at heart it is everywhere the same.

How should Americans face the new world? What attitudes and policies should we pursue? The cornerstone must be patience, the authors insist, quoting Franz Kafka: "Perhaps there is only one cardinal sin: impatience. Because of impatience we were driven out of Paradise, because of impatience we cannot return." We must recognize both the purposes and limitations of politics. Ours is a plural society that has proven capable of living with internal differences and ambiguity. The American purpose must be to coexist patiently over time with differences on the international stage. The limitations of foreign policy that affect our ancestors and us alike dictate that no nation can long impose its will on others in distant corners of the world. Politics entails compromise, adjustment, trimming ambitions and goals to accommodate to our neighbor's goals. Each nation seeks security in order that its peoples may flourish and develop.

But a second goal is to assist others to achieve their goals, to grow into authentic independent nation states capable of safeguarding themselves from expansionism from the East. The best assurance of containment of international Communism is the rise and growth of strong independent centers of power, of countries with vital purposes, fertile acres and devotion to social justice. "We must, if we are to be faithful to the truth of history, acknowledge the diversity and imponderability of human society, and search for an American national role that will be in keeping both with our limitations, and our very great talents."

I believe *The New Politics,* with its eye on the facts of change and the permanence of politics among nations, is a study of enduring value in international politics. The authors point to the winds of change that require new policies for the West. They discuss soberly and thoughtfully the end of the era which saw American and Soviet power as paramount. Yet they avoid the temptation to discard the lessons of past politics. Circumstances change but the demands of politics and diplomacy persist. This lesson is worth expressing and reiterating in an age where men are seized either by the imperatives of change or the requirements of continuity. When events tempt us all to run to extremes, both in philosophy and action, this is no minor achievement.

The Search

THE MOVIEGOER. By Walker Percy. Knopf. $3.95.

By EDWIN KENNEBECK

JOHN BICKERSON BOLLING has achieved the ideal condition of moviegoing: he can bestow his extravagant appreciation on the images of John Wayne or Gregory Peck without being deceived about

MOMENT FOR VIETNAM

(Commemoration, 1959)

Each has the season that is best, I know.
There are dark caverns where hate cannot sleep
And martyrs shine out in their moment's world
Having some promises to God to keep.
(The novices turn Missal pages for those long ago
And celebrate the Guillotine or Coliseum so
As at a festival, chanting *Intret in conspectu.*)

Bright here the long cool sunset,
Clear the air where postulants play ball or
kneel in prayer.
(Small difference when the heart is God's
Who made the thread
From trees grainstalks, as He did the bread.)

Peace has one face. Bury her in night
Where ignorance shuts off eternity
Or in the brilliant light where children play.
It is God's house, this earth, and He will trim
The lamp, adjusting all, when all the sons are in.
And yet play not forgetting, kneel not far
From where the dark and sleepless caverns are.

SISTER MARY FAITH, O.S.B.

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their quality. A pair of moonlit lovers on the silver screen, he knows, have no relation to life, but they delight him just the same. His gift of appreciation derives from an honest, personal, helpless evaluation of his life, his city, the popular culture of his nation, and the wide, gray sickness that lies over the land.

Bolling, who narrates the story, is, at twenty-nine, a successful New Orleans stockbroker. The main subject of his recollection, or diary, is not movies but his "search," which is his attempt to find out what valuable thing he must or can do. "The search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life. . . . To become aware of the possibility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair." The movies are not very useful in this regard; although they are onto things, on the screen "the search always ends in despair." For example, the movie hero who has amnesia and finds himself in a strange place "takes up with the local librarian, sets about proving to the local children what a nice fellow he is, and settles down with a vengeance. . . . In two weeks . . . he might just as well be dead." (This novel is about America; movies like *La Strada* or *Gervaise* would surely alter Bolling's theory.)

So Bolling tries to find out why he is in the world. Taking one of his sexy secretaries away for a weekend doesn't give him much of a clue. Neither does selling some land at a good price; or watching the carnival parades as Mardi Gras approaches to usher in Ash Wednesday; and neither does moviegoing, of course, except perhaps when he takes along his crippled, spastic young step-brother, who, like himself, lights up in wordless joy as Clint Walker rides a horse over the badlands in *Fort Dobbs*.

But in his life there is also Kate Cutrer, Kate, who on the eve of her wedding survived an auto accident that took her fiancé's life. Kate, now almost drowned in a psychological maelstrom, lives with her stepmother, Bolling's Great-Aunt Emily, who is an elegant, kindly, talkative remnant of an old Southern family. Only Jack Bolling has the full insight to know when he can help to ease Kate's terrors, and when she must be left to suffer them alone. Gradually he comes to see the meaning of his insight, and we understand that his somewhat static, reflective, strange but beautiful story has cut through layers of soft dreams and crusty realities to discover in one man's soul the core of compassion.

Walker Percy has made his novel of oblique angles, all smoothly fitted together, and all finally, despite his unwillingness to push or even nudge an effect, making its points and creating one form that reflects and illuminates all the scenes and characters. The retroactive effect: the best novels have it. And he gets just right the color and shape of the world of "everydayness": a neat styrene identification card; his landlady, Mrs. Schexnaydre, "a vigorous pony-size

A re-evaluation of a major English poet

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blond who wears sneakers summer and winter"; a girl who can't help overplaying her part when she meets children, "squatting down and hugging her knees like Joan Fontaine visiting an orphanage."

Near the end, old Aunt Emily gives Bolling a long speech in which she speaks of the virtues of her "class." "More than anything," she says, "I wanted to pass on to you the one heritage of the men of our family, a certain quality of spirit, a gaiety, a sense of duty, a nobility worn lightly, a sweetness, a gentleness with women—the only good things the South ever had and the only things that really matter in this life." It is, really, an appalling speech (an old Negro passes in the street to remind the gallant South of traditional atrocities), but in a reverse way it helps to crystallize Bolling's awareness of his terrible attachment to Kate. Kate says to him, "It seems to me that if we are together a great deal and you tell me the simplest things and not laugh at me—I beg you for pity's own sake never to laugh at me—tell me things like: Kate, it is all right for you to go down to the drugstore, and give me a kiss, then I will believe you. Will you do that?" And Bolling, his search ended and his ordeal begun, says, "Yes, I'll do that."

A French Blight

PATHS OF LOVE: *Two Short Novels.* By Vercors. Putnam. $4.
FÊTE. By Roger Vailland. Knopf. $3.95.

By ALICE ELLEN MAYHEW

TWO NOVELLAS and a novel which represent an eccentric but perennial strain in French writing—for it's sex, sex, sex that makes the world go round, but it's got to the point where it's pretty dull—have appeared this last season. They are the works of two very promising writers: Roger Vailland who won the *Prix Goncourt* a few years ago with *The Law,* a surfacely cool examination of a swarthy and brutal society, and Vercors *(nom de plume* of Jean Brüller) who wrote a clever satire called *You Shall Know Them,* and the beautiful, haunting *la Silence de la Mer,* about life in occupied France.

These latest works are dull, spurious attempts, typical of a whole blighted area in modern fiction, to apply a certain élan, a little precious intellectuality, some modish philosophizing to slight tales of sexual scheming. In all three cases in point there is a total absence of love. Love, or what passes, is an aberration and we are faced with a gallery of freaks, of *incapables,* and the reader dare not protest the mood of pseudo-sophistication lest he be accused of being grossly naive. Both these authors employ a kind of clinical approach that tends to bully the reader.

Vercors, particularly, in *Paths of Love,* has assembled a bizarre group of sadists, masochists, hedonists, pimps and martyrs in two short novels: *December's Freedom* and *Monsieur Prousthe.* Neither of these bear close examination, but I note an interesting similarity between two pieces and Vailland's larger work from the point of view of statements of personal morality and in the division of society into oppressors and natural victims. One of Vercors' characters states that, "since we are in a tunnnel where kicks and blows are freely dealt, it's better not to be at the receiving end . . . that's the only philosophy, the only moral law." Vailland's main character is a little more positive. In this book, the new game which forms the Law is ruled by one man, and it is called a *fête. Fêtes* might be love affairs, political activities, jazz sessions, meals, anything—so long as ecstasy is the end. "He gave and enjoyed *fêtes* that were real in so far as they were successful. That was integrity. . . . Such was his morality." "He had just found the name that he was seeking for his morality: the art of living."

It is apparent that there are going to be a lot of victims left lying about in both of these authors' worlds. *Fête* extends the vision of Vailland's earlier, and far more brilliant, *The Law,* which was also a novel on the strong and the weak. The frivolity of the Law which ruled that society was more than a game: it reflected life in Monacose. Again, there were those who were, by nature, victims to the few who pursued their own implacable ends.

But, tough, cynical, pagan as it was, *The Law* was a satire of substance, lucid and intense. *Fête,* with its confusions of motivations, its endless explanations of Vailland's notions of personal sovereignty, its rather poutish hero whose wife helps him prepare his

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passionless little affairs, his childish little complaints and boredoms, its rather comical dialogue, can not be taken very seriously. It fails even to shock because its characters are so inexorably symbols of Vailland's teams of sovereigns and victims.

Vercors, though less articulate, accedes to the same notion of hedonistic morality and there are plenty of dupes strewn through his stories. The oppressor is again a "superior" being who must under no circumstances allow himself to be emotionally bored, or who is himself a victim of neurotic desires. His victims (women, in the main) are esoterically bound up in this mysterious business and they bear it with more or less grace; but too frequently they resemble the poor little birds in the gilded cages.

In the first of Vercors' novels, a young wife is explaining to a young man who is in love with her about her relationship with a third man, who is her lover, who is her mother's husband, and who is her grandmother's lover, all at the same time. "You want to know if I loved him? No, I didn't. He's always filled me with a kind of hate. It's you I loved, you, you—to distraction. I hate him, but I'm his mistress, and I'll remain his mistress as long as he'll want me to." "So there," she adds petulantly. "Understand that, if you can. . . ."

To understand that, to understand her or any of the characters, to understand even what the author is driving at, even literarily, in these two pieces of drivel (the other novel is about a sadist), to accept them as serious works of fiction, as anything more than an unfortunate affectation that blights French literature from time, to time is beyond my patience and ability.

REVIEWERS

Kenneth Thompson, who has written extensively on foreign policy, is a former member of the Political Science faculties of Northwestern University and the University of Chicago.

Edwin Kennebeck is on the staff of a well-known New York publishing house.

Alice Ellen Mayhew, who recently returned from France, writes frequently on French literary matters.

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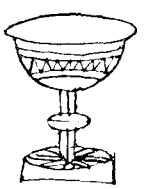

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